‘**Mother any distance greater than a single span…’**

**From Book of Matches.**

This poem is about a relationship between Armitage and his mother and the change it undergoes as Armitage moves out. The poem has a metaphor where his mother, on coming to help set up the new home, measures for curtain and windows and reels out the measuring tape This is turned into a comment on their relationship and of his mother being unwilling to let go of Armitage.

*Note connection with ‘my father thought it bloody queer…’*

**S1**

1. Why does Armitage use ‘mother’ and not ‘mum’? Why do you think his mother has come to help him?  
   *distanced - establishes that he doesn’t have the dependency on her - calm tone, growing respect – but bond still there. Creates sense that it’s her that needs to be there, not so much him.*
2. How can a wall cover acres? How can a floor be a prairie?  
   *like the walls feel like acres – like the distance between the son and the mother. Because he will be on his own, the space feel big and empty.*

**S2**

1. The mother is described as being at ‘the zero end’. This means the end of the tape she is holding. What other meanings do you think the words have?  
   *She has been there from when he was born – since his ‘zero-end’. Possibly also that she is nearing the end of her life – this is reinforced in the next stanza with the idea that at some point the tape will break or be dropped – then he’ll have to ‘fall or fly’.*
2. How can a tape measure reel out ‘years'? ‘*Measures’ the time between them, and maybe the reporting centimetres etc is like recalling memories of events like birthdays etc.teh tape measure is a symbol for the years.*
3. Who is the ‘anchor?’ Who is the ‘kite’?  
   *Mum is the anchor – she wants to keep him near, close to her – keeping him on the ground:* *son is the kite – flying away, seeking freedom, but still ‘tethered’ to the ground*

**S3**

1. What has to give?  
   *Time for him to separate from the constant care of his parents – dropping or breaking the tape measure is a symbol for this. He’s struggling to find the middle ground between completely dependent and completely independent – there’s a recognition that this might only come with his mother’s death – when her fingers stop pinching “the last one-hundreth of an inch”.*
2. L7 :the line between them is ‘still feeding out.’ L12-13 the mother's fingertips; still pinch/the last one hundredth of an inch.’ What different aspects of the mother’s relationship with Armitage are suggested by these two details?  
   *Growing apart but his mother’s still trying to hold on to him. re-forming his relationship with his mother. Mum might also be clinging on to life, as well as him.*
3. Many young people want to leave home but are also worried by about the problems and responsibilities of being independent. At the end of the poem it seems Armitage has 2 options:

* To open the hatch and live his own life, maybe to succeed, maybe to fail.
* To leave the hatch closed and go back downstairs to his mum and stay safe, secure and sheltered – at least for the time being.  
  What reasons would he have for choosing either option?  
  What would be the different disadvantages of taking each of the options? If you can link your ideas to other poems you have studied.

**Exploring Language Structure and Form.**

L7&9 Astronauts sometimes have to walk in space to conduct experiments or repair their spacecraft.

1. How does the image of walking in space connect to the image of the tape measure?
2. How does it connect to line 7?
3. How does it connect to the last line?
4. Can you think of two ways in which holding the tape measure conveys something about the relationship between Armitage and his mother?
5. Why has Armitage chosen the single words: ‘Anchor’, ‘Kite’?
6. Explain how each of the people represented by these words have the qualities of the object?
7. L11 & 15 are very short so they have extra impact. What do you think the impact is?
8. The poem is in three stanzas. Write out in your own words what each stanza deals with.

**Exploring the poem**

1. The poem is directly addressed to Armitage’s mother. How do you think she would have felt when she first read it?
2. What is the tone of the poem: Choose and explain your choice:

Warm& loving. Cold & objective. Embarrassed. Amused. Nostalgic

Proud. Any others.

1. Write a paragraph on Armitage's relationship with his mother.

*At the beginning of the poem,* Armitage *has moved into anew house and is feeling overwhelm led by the sense of space and freedom. His mother has come to help him measure up for carpets and curtains.* Armitage *feels his mother….*